

# FRIENDS OF PONTOOSUC LAKE

## NEWSLETTER

May 2012

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### **ANNUAL MEETING AT ITAM LODGE** **TUESDAY, MAY 29 at 7:00 P. M.**

The annual meeting of The Friends of Pontoosuc will be held Tuesday, May 29. Agenda will include herbicide results and plans, water chestnut control, Zebra mussel threat, lake level control, the annual drawdown, and others.

All are invited to attend. Bring any questions or concerns you have about the care and management of Pontoosuc Lake and Watershed, and the operation of our lake association.

### **LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT**

Hello to all the Friends of Pontoosuc. This letter is a brief overview of our activities and challenges. Please provide feedback and any help you can.

#### **CONTROL OF INVASIVE PLANTS**

The 2011 herbicide treatment was quite successful; See Gordon's article below for details. We do not know why, but in 2011 as in 2008 there was very little regrowth of the Eurasian Milfoil after the spring treatment, while in the intervening years the regrowth was worse. For some reasons we don't understand the plants are more resilient some years than others.

The program is funded jointly by Pittsfield and Lanesborough, splitting the cost 50:50. The money has been appropriated by both the City and the Town in their respective fy2012 budgets for the summer 2012 work. However, we must take action now to secure funding for the 2013 treatment, and have

requested \$10,000 each from Lanesborough and Pittsfield in the fy2013 budgets. The Lanesborough 2013 budget is very tight, and the decisions on what gets funded will be made at the annual town meeting. **Lanesborough voters, please attend the Town meeting, Tuesday, June 12 at the Lanesborough School, and support our budget request. We need your yes vote. Pittsfield voters, encourage your city council members to support the lake budget.**

#### **IMPROVED WEB SITE**

Thanks to Dick Cetti, our web site has been greatly improved. Simply Google Friends of Pontoosuc to find the site which is hosted in the Town of Lanesborough web page. If there is additional information you would like to see on the site please mention it to Dick or me.

#### **LANESBOROUGH RIGHTS-OF-WAY STUDY**

A study committee has been formed in Lanesborough to examine the issues associated

with the many rights-of-way leading to Pontoosuc Lake and the town ways which are not accepted streets. Objectives are to:

- Educate stakeholders (owners, those with rights, the public and public officials) on: rights, responsibilities, ownership, property tax impacts, liabilities, related Mass law, and more.
- Recommend to the selectboard a policy for dealing with right-of-way issues.
- Develop a long-range plan for correcting the maintenance problem with dirt roads and the deterioration of Pontoosuc Lake water quality caused by silt run-off into the lake.

Committee members are working to develop a list of all rights-of-way, actual ownership, laws governing rights and responsibilities, typical problems and concerns and a transition plan for dirt roads maintained by the town but privately owned. A report will be issued and we will make it available on our website.

## **NEWSLETTERS**

This is our spring newsletter which we send via USPS mail to our extended list of interested supporters. We also send brief e-mail newsletters on topics of interest as they arise. We have over 700 contacts on our mail list, but only have e-mail for about 150. We will send this to both. If you only get the postal service version and would like to be on our e-mail distribution list, please contact us to be included. We need help generating and editing newsletters. Please contact us if you can help as we need to be doing a better job of keeping all lake people informed.

## **STREAMFLOW STUDY**

There is a concern among environmentalists that dam management actions are altering the in-stream habitat below impoundments with negative impacts on native species. In Massachusetts, the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER, part of the DFW) is charged with addressing this issue and is developing guidelines for dam managers

(which may become requirements). We are concerned that these guidelines/requirements may make it difficult if not impossible to conduct drawdowns and to refill after a successful drawdown. In response to our concerns the DER agreed to conduct a pilot study using Pontoosuc and Onota lakes. This activity started 2-3 years ago but has been on hold because of staffing changes at DER. It is resuming this spring, and the lake representatives on this study are providing independent statistical assessments and the lake management perspective. Stay tuned for further developments.

## **OTHER PROJECTS**

Additional activities which we performed last year and will continue in the future are:

- Obtain permits from the Pittsfield and Lanesborough conservation commissions for lake management activities including drawdown and herbicide plant control. The deep drawdown permit last year required a great deal of work.
- Make measurements and generate reports in order to comply with the orders of conditions issued by the conservation commissions pertaining to lake management. Daily monitoring of flow in the Housatonic below the dam was required for the deep drawdown, and this work was shared among 5 volunteers, Dick, Sean, Gordon, Jack, and Lee. We would welcome more hands.
- Implementation of our watershed management plan. Correction of the dirt road runoff is our top priority.
- Annual Lake clean-up in the spring.
- Hand-pull water chestnuts.
- Water quality sampling and lake weed surveys to monitor the health of the lake, provide an historical database to guide future actions, and to comply with conditions imposed by the conservation commissions.

The Friends of Pontoosuc Lake is a volunteer organization. We welcome your participation. Please support us financially by returning your dues in the enclosed envelope.

Lee Hauge, President

## HERBICIDE TREATMENT RESULTS AND PLANS

We now have now completed four years of Herbicide Treatment and the overall results are very good. The 2011 treatment by Aquatic Control Technology, (ACT), was extremely good without any excessive growth spots, which easily met the contract guarantee of 85% weed free. The excellent result was due to excellent weather conditions during the application of the herbicide on June 8, 2011. ACT used the herbicide, Reward, to control the Eurasian Milfoil, (*Myriophyllum Spicatum*), and Curly Leaf Pondweed, (*Potamogeton Crispus*). The May treatment of the lake using the herbicide, Reward, will be the standard for the foreseeable future. ACT now has the contract through 2014 since they won the new three year contract issued in the spring of 2011. Again I am sure you have noticed that the clarity of the water is better and there were no weeds on the surface or floating on the surface. As usual a post-treatment inspection was done on July 13<sup>th</sup> and a Macrophyte survey was done on September 6th confirming that the Milfoil and Curly leaf was gone except for a few plants widely dispersed. Several native plants were growing including Coontail, Water Celery, Pondweed, and a new native Richardson's Pondweed. The fall survey again showed an increase of European Pondweed, (*Najas Minor*), in Gunn's cove and in the northwest corner of the lake. This was expected and can be dealt with by making spot treatments with Reward depending on availability of money. The surveys showed that no follow up treatment was required. ACT joined with us for the September survey and concurred with our findings.

As required by law volunteers from the Friends of Pontoosuc will post signs (like the one below from last year) notifying everyone about the day of treatment:

Boating, fishing, and swimming will not be allowed on the day of treatment. The lake will be patrolled to instruct people who may not have seen the signs.

LAKE TO BE CHEMICALLY TREATED ON  
THURSDAY, JUNE 2ND

**WARNING**

THESE WATERS WILL/HAVE BEEN  
CHEMICALLY TREATED TO  
CONTROL THE GROWTH OF  
NUISANCE AQUATIC  
VEGETATION AND ALGAE

USAGE OF THESE WATERS FOR:

DRINKING AND COOKING  
ARE PROHIBITED UNTIL JUNE 13TH


BOATING, FISHING, SWIMMING  
ARE PROHIBITED UNTIL JUNE 3RD

WATERING OF LIVESTOCK IS  
PROHIBITED UNTIL JUNE 13TH

IRRIGATION IS PROHIBITED UNTIL JUNE 13TH

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Aquatic Control Technology, Inc.  
11 John Road  
Sutton, MA 01590



THIS CHEMICAL TREATMENT IS BEING CONDUCTED PURSUANT TO A PERMIT  
ISSUED BY THE MA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (MASSDEP)

Since Reward is a contact herbicide it does not kill the roots but curtails the growth, and some treatment will be needed each year. If you should be using lake water to irrigate your lawn or garden, note that you should not use the water for ten days allowing the Reward to biodegrade.

Gordon E. Zaks FOP/W clerk  
(*Aquatic Control Technology, Inc. October 13, 2011 report available on our Web Page*)

## **DEEP DRAWDOWN IN 2011-2012**

### **INITIATES A NEW LONG TERM WEED MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Winter drawdown is one of our most effective means of controlling the most problematic species of aquatic plant which has become established in Pontoosuc Lake, Eurasian Milfoil. If the lake bottom can be exposed to freezing temperatures for long enough so the frost penetrates to the depth of the plant roots, the plant will be killed. This is more effective than the herbicide treatment because the plant regrows from the roots after the herbicide treatment.

Of course the Milfoil will eventually spread from deeper water back to the area exposed in the drawdown primarily through fragmentation. When we were performing mechanical harvesting this regrowth was greatly accelerated because of excessive fragmentation. Even without harvesting there will be enough fragmentation to eventually re-establish the milfoil in the shallow regions. So the plan is to drawdown at least 3 feet every year and to do a deep drawdown every third year. Hopefully this will keep the area exposed by this deep drawdown relatively free of Milfoil throughout the three summers following. We will gather quantitative data on the effectiveness of this approach with our macrophyte surveys. This summer will be the first after a deep drawdown without the impact of mechanical harvesting, so the results will be very interesting.

We requested a 6 foot drawdown but the Pittsfield/Lanesborough Conservation Commissions only granted a 5 foot. See the Friends of Pontoosuc web-site for the details of the request and the conditions imposed by the Con Coms. There are two primary concerns about drawdowns: 1) Stress to the populations of fish and other wildlife, and 2) Inability to refill in time for the summer season. Our plan addresses these concerns as follows:

- At the end of January we initiate a refill to - 3 feet to reduce the risk of not being able to refill by May. Pontoosuc has a very large watershed so the risk is low to begin with but this action further reduces the risk.
- The January partial refill also reduces stress on fish because it provides habitat volume before oxygen depletion occurs in the deep water.
- We also initiate a refill to -1 foot on April 1 even if ice-out has not happened to enable fish spawning and further ensure a full lake for the summer season.

Despite weather which was less than ideal, we believe the 2011-12 drawdown was a success, and if the data supports this we will request a 6 foot drawdown in 2014-15.

Lee Hauge

## **ZEBRA MUSSELS**

Zebra mussels were found in Laurel Lake in 2009 and a week later members of the "Friends" board were meeting with state officials to determine the best way to keep the infestation from spreading to lakes like Pontoosuc

These zebra mussels have created an absolute havoc in the many lakes and rivers that they have infected, devouring small organisms and algae through their efficient filtering systems. They are able to affix themselves almost like glue to objects, clogging pipes and creating swimming hazards.

Dr. Daniel Molloy, a scientist from the New York Museum Cambridge Research Institute, and his colleagues are credited with discovering the bacterial strain *pseudomonas fluorescens* that is able to kill zebra mussels and *pseudomonas fluorescens* is the active ingredient in Zequanox. Molloy has been quoted as saying, “the bacteria used in Zequanox are common and can be found inside refrigerators or on rugs”. “It is omnipresent everywhere,” He has said, “it is already in the lakes and that is because it lives in soil, and its job is to protect plants roots.

Zequanox which is being introduced as the first and only invasive mussel control solution that is naturally sourced and environmentally compatible. It is considered highly selective for invasive zebra and quagga (*Dreissena* species) mussels with no impact on other aquatic organism.

Some are saying that it has the potential to be a game changing technological breakthrough in the battle to manage zebra mussel infestations. It is considered a totally “green”, natural, environmentally friendly solution that should require a minimal amount of regulatory compliance effort. It has a low to nonexistent exposure risk to humans, native aquatic life and fish. It is effective at both controlling adult mussels and preventing juvenile planktonic form of mussels from settling.

Our bottom line continues to actively support a vigorous monitoring of boats coming into Pontoosuc. To this end DCR has agreed to fund the same boat ramp monitor at the Hancock boat ramp as we had last year. We will probably be looking to augment this with volunteers and will be discussing it in more depth at the annual meeting.

Jack Hickey

## **PITTSFIELD PLANS SUMMER 2012**

With the boating season soon to be fully underway, the City of Pittsfield will once again be staffing the public access boat ramps at both Onota Lake and Pontoosuc Lake with ramp monitors.

The purpose of the boat ramp monitors is making certain that all vessels looking to launch (canoes, kayaks, motor boats....really, anything that floats) are not posing a threat of bringing zebra mussels into our waterbodies. The monitors check in with each boater prior to their launching to determine if the boat poses a risk, based on past boating history. If the boat is not contaminated, all that is required of the boater is to sign and display the Clean Boat Certification Form on their tow vehicle dashboard. The monitors also are versed in

zebra mussel biology and are a good source of information on best ways to decontaminate your boat. Occasionally, they also make recommendations on where to get a good meal in the area! You will see the monitors at the ramps by mid-May and they will be working seven days a week through Labor Day. If you see them out there, stop in and say hello. It sometimes gets lonely out there!

Funding for this effort is being supplied by the City of Pittsfield and with a grant of \$12,000 from the MA Department of Conservation and Recreation. For additional information on the city of Pittsfield’s zebra mussel spread prevention efforts, please contact me at 414.499.9344.  
Jim McGrath

## **DOCK LICENSE CHANGES**

Because Pontoosuc Lake is a great pond, any dock on the lake must be licensed by the Commonwealth. This requirement is based on the Mass General Law, Chapter 91 which dates back to colonial times and protects the public right of access. Most docks on Pontoosuc are not licensed and I encourage everyone with a dock to get a license to protect your own right to have that dock. I have prepared a document "Dock License Process" which describes the steps necessary to get a license. The document is on our web site, and I will email it to anyone interested. Two things are in the works which will impact the licensing process; 1)The DEP, which has responsibility for implementing the provisions of Chapter 91, is in the process of revising the regulations on docks, and 2) In Lanesborough we are going to try again to pass a dock by-law.

The dock regulation changes are part of a broader activity within DEP to streamline their processes and avoid unnecessary work. They are planning to define a new category of license, a General License, which will not require a detailed review by the DEP personnel, just a certification by the applicant that his application meets the guidelines established for this General License. Al Collings, President of COLAP, Jack Hickey, President of LAPA West, and I have been working with DEP to ensure that the changes do not make the process more difficult for the applicant and to

make the guidelines for this general license open enough so most docks at lakeside residences will comply. We hope to have an opportunity to review these revised regs sometime this spring before they are implemented.

The proposed Lanesborough dock by-law was presented at the annual Town meeting in June 2011 for adoption, but no action was taken. The moderator made a judgment that the time spent on this one issue would prevent completing all the other business necessary to complete at the meeting, and that only a minority of the attendees had interest in the subject so he moved past the by-law article without action. There was no objection. The by-law will be presented for adoption at a special Town meeting in the summer of 2012. This forum will enable the issues to be discussed adequately and decisions made by the meeting attendees. The major issue is whether to permit docks at rights-of-way. We have tried to reach a consensus on this issue, but there are strong feelings on both sides, so the only resolution will be to have the meeting attendees vote yea or nay. We will ensure that all citizens are informed of the meeting and have an opportunity to provide input before and at the meeting where the decision will be made.

Lee Hauge

## **PONTOOSUC & CANADA GEESE**

Are you one of those lakers to whom the honking of Canada geese reminds you of the feces mess they leave on your lawn? A large group of lake volunteers recently attended a LAPA meeting to hear from federal and state officials about the best ways to manage this nuisance. The following is a synopsis of what they heard.

Prior to the 1930's geese did not nest here, yet today in the Berkshires geese are year round tenants in Pontoosuc, Onota and surrounding bodies of water. The attendees were told that Canada geese are grazers forming permanent pair bonds and don't begin nesting until they are three years old. Adult females lay 4-6 eggs in a clutch. Usually by the time the young are 4-6 weeks old, the broods begin gathering in large flocks. Non-breeders and yearlings form

separate flocks and then by fall, they all gather into one large flock for the winter.

In the Berkshires there are two different populations of Canada geese. The first is the migratory population which passes through in the spring and fall. Pontoosuc is one of many resting areas for these migrating birds. The second is the resident population descendants of captive geese used as decoys in the 1930's by waterfowl hunters. When live decoys were outlawed captive birds were liberated. With no pattern of migration, these geese began nesting. So today lake side lawns and parks provided an excellent year round source of food around the lake where there are no predators making for a perfect habitat for geese.

Also in the 1960s and early '70s a "translocation" project carried out by Mass Wildlife moved birds from the coast into central and western Massachusetts to support hunters. Mass Wildlife was surprised by the population explosion which followed. As a result of these factors and community imposed restrictions on hunting, resident goose flocks have grown well beyond what Mass Wildlife envisioned 50 years ago.

Biologists estimate that the tens of thousands geese resident in and around Berkshire lakes deposit an estimated of goose droppings of upwards of a pound and half of droppings per day. The governmental agencies suggest the problem is not the presence of geese but the number of geese and made the following suggestions to prevent goose grief (poop):

Don't feed them. Geese concentrate wherever people feed them and feeding encourages birds to stay in areas where they normally wouldn't and build up flock sizes the habitat can't support. The food you feed ducks and geese is not their proper diet. Feeding makes geese less wary of people and lowers natural winter mortality.

Employ scare tactics put out flags, tying aluminum pie plates along strings, using scarecrows all may help keep geese away from an area until they learn these objects pose no threat. Full bodied swan or coyote decoys sometimes work because geese perceive the decoys as threats. It's important to move decoys periodically or the geese will realize the decoys aren't real. For an active approach, try walking up to the birds then flapping a tablecloth. Trained dogs are especially effective but need to be used on a long term basis. If geese have to spend too much energy avoiding harassment to eat and rest properly, they will go elsewhere.

Try barriers. Geese tend to walk to their feeding site from water, and rarely fly up over a fence, especially during the "molting" period (mid-June through mid-July) when they cannot fly. A 3-foot chicken wire fence is an effective barrier. Geese like to be able to see around them, which is why you don't see them in the woods or in tall grass fields. Therefore, planting a hedge or leaving a wide swatch of uncut weeds between water and mowed grass creates a natural, low maintenance barrier.

Studies by biologists show that one of the most efficient ways to reduce the size of a flock is to encourage hunting. It increases mortality of adult geese-resulting in fewer birds laying eggs and adding fewer goslings to the population. Geese have been hunted in New England for centuries and their tasty meat is prized by many. When local ordinances become so restrictive that they effectively prohibit hunting, towns inadvertently create "sanctuaries" for geese, and the buildup of flocks cause problems. Recent studies indicate that for populations to be controlled, at least 30-35% needs to be harvested annually.

Maybe we should consider replacing the traditional Thanksgiving turkey with a Canada goose.

Jack Hickey



**FRIENDS OF PONTOOSUC**

Gordon Zaks, Clerk  
17 Narragansett Ave  
Pittsfield, MA 01201-1021

**SPRING LAKE CLEAN-UP  
JUNE 8-10**

**CONTACT  
MICHELE RIVERS-MURPHY  
443-7881**

**YOUR HELP IS NEEDED**

**THE FRIENDS OF PONTOOSUC  
THANK**

**U-DRIVE BOAT RENTAL  
281-4196**

**FOR THEIR GENEROSITY IN PROVIDING  
PONTOON BOATS TO SUPPORT OUR WORK**

**2012 ANNUAL MEETING  
FRIENDS OF PONTOOSUC  
TUESDAY MAY 29 7:00 PM  
ITAM LODGE on the lake**

**GET AN UPDATE ON STATUS OF THE LAKE, HERBICIDE  
WEED CONTROL RESULTS AND PLANS, DRAWDOWN  
PLANS, WATER QUALITY, AND MORE**